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ABSTRACT

This report provides an introduction to technology-based materials and mechanisms for ensuring student teachers' exposure to thought-provoking classroom diversity experiences. The paper discusses diversity in modern, multicultural, U.S. society and proposes an alternative definition that focuses more on an acknowledgement of the individual, with his/her total sum of experiences and characteristics. It is suggested that use of such a definition in developing teacher education curricula might induce a focus that would necessitate stricter control of the field experience components and a more effective interface between curricular content and the realities of life, with learning more centered on social issues and problems. It is maintained that students must understand themselves before they can be expected to assign value to others. Important technological innovations to assist in this effort include videotapes, relational databases, and CD-ROM. Western Illinois University is used an example of how to foster multicultural awareness in a somewhat restricted, rural, less culturally aware environment. The traditional approach to multicultural education has not necessarily led to the desired appreciation and respect for population diversity due to deep philosophical differences of opinion, environmental limitations, and a lack of self-appreciation. Alternative instructional aids, such as the database and CD-ROM potential described, cannot help but allow for movement toward a more global appreciation for others and a less restricted, less hostile environment, in general. (NAV)

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Assuring an Appreciation for Student Diversity: Alternatives to Teacher Education Field Experiences.

Dr. Georg W. Gunzenhauser, Dr. J. Q. Adams, and Mr. William Paulding

> *"A key precept for a multicultural education should be respect for the richness of difference...Learning in general and learning and developing a sense of self-identify in particular are part of a process of comparing similarities and differences." (Singer, 1994)*

Presentation Intent

The AACTE Plann[illegible]ommittee has identified the principle theme for the 1996 Annual Meeting to focus on a discussion of diversity and its role, impact, and implications for teacher reform. In keeping with this theme, the intent of this presentation is to provide participants with an introduction to viable technology-based materials and mechanisms for ensuring student teachers' exposure to thought-provoking classroom diversity experiences.

Background

America, unlike many other countries, remains a relatively new 'Mecca' for individuals seeking refuge and freedom. Perhaps the best known beacon for this 'Mecca" is the Statue of Liberty, located on Ellis Island. In keeping with this tradition of accepting persecuted individuals among the fold, the following sonnet was added to the base of the statue:

> ***Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, / With conquering limbs astride from land to land, / Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand / A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name / Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame. / "Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she / With silent lips. "Give me you tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" ("the New Colossus", Emma Lazarus, 1901).***

While one could conclude on the basis of the original Declaration of Independence and Constitution and the aforementioned inscription that we, as a nation, are relatively unbiased in our perspectives of others, history has proven time and again that such appreciation for "the tired...poor..huddled masses...wretched refuse" has been severely lacking. Most recently, federal (issues related to Affirmative action and the presidential campaign) and state actions (most notably California) have all but confirmed a lack of historical perspective and/or an appreciation for the cultural diversity of the American populace. Given these actions, one must conclude that the past thirty years of multicultural education programming has failed, even in principle, to achieve its stated goal. It is therefore extremely imperative that such diversity appreciation efforts be examined.

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G W Gunzenhauser

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One of the most interesting phenomena of the past three to four decades has been a shift in how we perceive American culture. What has once been termed to be a "melting pot" culture has, in more recent times, been redefined to be a "mixed salad". This change in perspective concerning the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity has its origins in the manner in which educators have approached the construct of social interaction, in school curricula. For decades, public school curricula and teacher education programs (especially the social foundations and philosophy components) have relied solely on the Western intellectual or Eurocentric tradition. Some individuals have countered that such a curriculum denies the existence of alternative cultures and thus is paramount to 'cultural genocide' (Yusef Ben-Jochannan, 1991; Molefi Kete Asante, 1990). In response to such arguments, universities and teacher education programs began, as early as the 1960s, to develop culture-specific studies (i.e., African-American Studies, Chicano Studies, Women's Studies, etc...). This approach to cultural awareness and appreciation might, in prior years, have been labeled as 'separate but equal'.

This separatist-based response has not occurred without rebuke. Schlesinger (1992) and Ravitch (1990) have accused 'multiculturalists' of engaging in social and psychological interventions rather than teaching unbiased, all-inclusive history. Instead, they suggested that the most basic tenets of Western intellectual tradition are predicated on the constructs of truth and objectivity. This premise of truth and objectivity is a matter of perspective as much as a matter of philosophical logic. It fails to adequately address the "human condition" -- combination of personal fears, beliefs, experiences, and preferences, by arguing that only one acceptable perspective exists. Moreover, to suggest that individuals can disassociate the totality of their being when dealing with others or reflecting on an issue is, from a practical perspective, foolish and negates the very construct of a "free and just society" (Freire, 1971).

Given these varied perspectives, the ever-changing demographic dynamic of the general populace, and an apparent return to an "isolationist nation" perspective, what can or should we as teacher educators be focusing on with respect to multiculturalism and diversity? A starting point may be to consider the definitions that we employ for the construct of diversity.

Traditional Definitions of Diversity

The American Heritage Dictionary (1982) defines the term '**diversity**' to represent:

1. a. The fact or quality of being diverse.
   b. A point or respect in which things differ.;
2. Variety or multiformity.

and the term '**diverse**' to represent:

1. Distinct in kind; unlike.
2. Having variety in form; diversified.

Most frequently, when asked to define or illustrate the construct of population diversity, the general public will elect to focus on such easily identifiable characteristics as ethnicity, age, religion, and SES. Academicians and researchers, one the other hand, may discuss the notion of diversity in terms of sampling-frame heterogeneity. That is to say, for any given study characteristic (i.e., ethnicity, age, gender, SES, etc...), one would expect to see a cross-sectional variation among subjects. From a teacher preparation programming perspective, such diversity is most typically framed in a mandated form of field contact with a wide variety of public education students.

Such a "blinders-restricted' approach to the issue of diversity in the classroom is fraught with assumptions about the experience and environmental limitations. Many teacher education programs are located in a diversity-restrictive environment. That is to say, that such program environments (typically rural in nature) lack opportunities for future teachers to interact with ethnically and/or socially diverse populations. Even in diversity rich environments, these students often enjoy only a relatively 'short' superficial exposure to such populations, limited to what happens during their 50 to 120 minutes of daily contact in a rigidly controlled classroom. Moreover, no guarantees exist to ensure that such experiences include a broad spectrum of classroom events. Without such guarantees, teacher educators lack the ability to review and discuss events with their students, and perhaps more importantly contribute to a long-term awareness, appreciation, and respect for others.

An Alternative Definition of Diversity

The aforementioned issues are predicated on the assumption that diversity is limited to easily observable or measurable characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, age, gender, or SES). This basic premise is under-representative of the definitions provided by American Heritage Dictionary, and perhaps more to the point, contribute to a continuation of the apparent failure of some thirty years of multicultural education.

A review of the current literature base suggests that diversity may also manifest itself in many other ways. One could restrict this view to solely the educational arena. For instance, on a cognitive plane, students range in intellectual capacity (Wechsler IQs ranging from a low of 35 to a high of 200), process capacity (pre-concrete to formal operational), and learning orientation (accommodation to assimilation). Along the emotional/behavioral plane, students have been noted to exhibit continuums ranging from immaturity to maturity, and conformity to nonconformity. In terms of self-esteem, students range from self-deprecation to narcissism; and in terms of motivation, students have been identified as ranging from apathetic to self-directive. Expanding the view to a more global, social level, similar examples of diversity emerge (i.e., single parent Vs. dual-parent, body frame dimensions, personality, social engagement preferences, etc...).

Perhaps, a more appropriate definition of diversity should focus on an acknowledgment of the individual, with his/her sum total of experiences and characteristics. If one were to employ such an alternative definition of diversity in developing teacher education curricula, the teacher preparation focus would necessitate stricter control of the field experience componentry, and a more effect interface between curricular content and the realities of life..

Alternative Instructional Materials

A central component of any intervention aimed at enhancing students' understanding of, appreciation for, and respect for diversity should begin with the premise that all individuals are uniquely different. Having accepted this premise, the challenge then becomes: How do we encourage a willingness to accept others who are different?

The simplest answer to this challenge focuses on developing/fostering an environment that "creates a community of learners where everyone works together in a free and just society" (Pang, 1994, pp. 290). In practice such an approach allows for learning to occur within the boundaries of everyday life. That is to say, that learning is centered on social issues and problems. Given such a goal, and the aforementioned difficulties associated with field experiences: How does one create such an environment?

The most obvious point of origin must revolve around an unobstructed understanding of oneself. All too frequently, students are asked to assign value to others without a clear-cut appreciation for their own unique characteristics. This lack of appreciation may be as simple as a consequence of 'socialization' (i.e., for the betterment of society, individuality is frowned upon) or as complex as a consequence of 'fear' (i.e., if I explore too far, I might not like what I encounter). Without such a baseline perspective, however, no meaningful appreciation for the uniqueness of others can emerge. Consider for instance, the behavior of newly anointed high school students during the first day of class. While a few individuals exude a natural charm (social desirability), many individuals elect to attach themselves to 'establish' cliques on the basis of observable commonalties. As a consequence, the first few encounters often lead to an association that lasts for the next three to four years. When confronted by 'non-clique' members, the first and foremost observable interactions take a sterile, formal, rigid form. Oftentimes, an almost overpowering defense (i.e., 'let me leave this situation') mechanism 'kicks' in. Such 'clannishness', over the course of the formative years, leads to a lifetime of fear and distrust of others who do not belong to the clan. All educational experiences should encourage an appreciation for the uniqueness of the individual. In educational psychology terms, this process may necessitate the development of a 'graded membership'. Once individuals have begun to appreciate their own characteristics, the gradual introduction of others' characteristics may begin.

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To suggest that such introduction is easy or forthright is foolish. All to frequently, traditional curricula are developed in a linear fashion. That is to say, that curriculum developers and teachers identify concepts and timetables which oftentimes disallow for any substantive reflection or synthesis. Rather the intent of course work is to reach a predetermined point at the conclusion of the term. The emergence of relatively inexpensive and commonplace instructional technologies (multimedia, videotapes, databases, and simulcasts), however, has opened an alternative curricular pathway which might allow for such reflection and synthesis away from the traditional classroom. Such instructional alternatives can be reviewed independently and, if properly constructed, have the potential to serve as fodder for enhanced class discussion, exploration, and debate.

Two such instructional alternatives -- video tapes and a Paradox relational database -- have been developed and are currently in use within the WIU teacher education program. A third alternative -- a self-contained Macro-Media Director/Authorware cross-platform CD-ROM -- is currently under development. All three alternatives provide an avenue for instruction which is under the direct control of the classroom teacher, and all three alternatives afford students the opportunity to review and reflect on circumstances beyond the existing environment.

Video-based Experiences

As previously identified, one major obstacle to the fostering of a multicularally aware and respecting mind set is the environment in which such issues are discussed. Western Illinois University, while recognized as a regional comprehensive university, is never-the-less located in a relatively rural environment. Currently approximately 13% of the student population is ethnically diverse, and the surrounding communities (within a radius of 50 miles) is even more ethnically and culturally restricted. Any field placement within the general community therefore disallows for serious exposure to other 'clans'. Additionally, new state-mandated content, increased liability issues, and a reduced travel budget have led to the identification of a need for alternative instructional opportunities. A rather exhaustive review of existing materials led individual faculty and the Department of Educational Foundations (EDFD) to conclude that the most viable alternatives would need to be produced in-house. Because of the institution's status in the community, and as a consequence of the College of Education and Human Services (COEHS) foresight with respect to the importance of instructional technologies, opportunities presented themselves to alter the manner in which multicultural diversity was addressed. Dr. J. Q. Adams, in response to a university-wide general education assignment, developed and produced a video-tape series which currently serves as a principle instructional device in the EDFD 302 (Multicultural and Social Foundations of Education) course. This series has also been distributed nation-wide on the PBS network. The Department of Educational Foundations, in cooperation with Springfield, Illinois and Carpentersville, Illinois public schools has begun to video-tape live classroom interactions. These video tapes, in addition to depicting the realities of teaching, allow students enrolled in the EDFD 201 (Human

Growth and Development) and EDFD 301 (Psychology of Learning) courses to also observe minority students (African-American and Hispanic respectively) in action, in a departmentally controlled format. That is to say, that great pains have been taken to ensure that the distributed vignettes afford enrolled students an opportunity to observe a spectrum of interactions in a "reality-based" environment, rather than haphazardly hoping that actual field trips result in specific occurrences. In addition to utilizing the video tapes in class to 'drive home a point', tapes are also available for broadcast to dormitory settings and for review in the department during non-class hours. The principle advantage to this instructional format is that each faculty member can 'tailor' the vignette presentations to a particular class-associated need. Student feedback has been encouraging, and more to the point, it appears that students enrolled in student teaching have benefited from the experience.

Relational Database

In keeping with the arguments of Asante (1990) and Ben-Jochannan (1991), an effort was made to ensure adequate coverage of culture-specific diversity issues. To this end, Mr. William Paulding developed a Paradox-based relational data-base, employing a "blob" interface. Entitled the Multicultural Education Database (MED), this instructional tool operates much the same way that the current SilverPlatter ERIC system works. Currently consisting of three IBM-formatted high density disks, any student can 'load' the software and then conduct an unlimited search of the current contents. In addition to being relatively mobile, this particular database allows for the inclusion of new information as soon as it becomes available. It's sole restrictions are that the input program be Paradox, and that the user have sufficient hard-drive space. While somewhat dated with the advent of current InterNet access, the program never-the-less allows for an instructor-defined literature base. While not commonplace in EDFD course work, student feedback has been positive.

CD-ROM Technology

One of the newest and perhaps most far-reaching instructional innovations to emerge in the COEHS has been the recent availability of CD-ROM production capability. By employing commercially available software (MacroMedia Director and Authorware), faculty are now able to create cross-platform, stand-alone CAI-based materials. In addition to providing students with a 'bundled' set of notes, faculty can incorporate 'point and push' video and audio. Thus, an instructor may incorporate some of the aforementioned departmentally available video vignettes and the relational database in response to specific course objectives / goals. More importantly, students can review the CD-ROMs at any multi-media compatible site, at any point in their academic or professional career. While the current multicultural application is still undergoing development, a stand-alone "History of Cyprus" has already been

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developed. This application has not only received positive student feedback, but is also currently being considered for commercial distribution.

Summary

The traditional approach to multicultural education has not necessarily led to the desired appreciation for and respect for population diversity. In addition to deep philosophical differences of opinion with respect to how to accomplish this goal, environmental limitations and a lack of self-appreciation have led to a restricted perspective of the value of human differences. While not fully satisfying all the aforementioned limitations of current efforts, alternative instructional interventions have resulted in some change. Although not every institution has the capability or where-with-all to develop an extensive collection of instructional aides, current technologies do exist to enable faculty to effectively 'tailor' instruction to the needs of enrolled students. Such instructional aides can not help but allow for movement toward a more global appreciation for others, and thus a less restricted and less hostile environment in general. More to the point, students receiving such instructional aides should be more capable of professional succeeding, regardless of their eventual teaching environments.

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